

**SPORT & SOCIETY**The Summer Olympics and Paralympics through the lens  
of social scienceSend her Victorious: A Historiography of British Women  
Olympians 1896-2012

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**1: Introduction**

The Olympic Games are the single largest sports spectacle in the world and the most significant showcase for women athletes in the twenty first century. As Allen Guttman wrote in his overview, 'Very few cultural phenomena attract as much attention as the Olympic Games. More than one hundred thousand spectators vie for seats in the stadium, the arena, the velodrome, and the other sites of competition. Another two billion people follow the games on their television screens' (1992: preface). The British have played a prominent part in modern Olympic tradition since a version of the ancient games was resumed in Athens in 1896, though no women competed in this first edition. Stephanie Daniels and Anita Tedder suggest that the first female competitors took part in the jointly held Paris Games-World Exhibition of 1900 in ballooning, croquet, equestrianism, golf, sailing, and tennis (2000:16). With a Palace of Optics and an illuminated Celestial Globe, the Exposition celebrated both technological and cultural modernity in elaborate style, so Olympic women's sport was part of a media festival from the outset (Nead, 2007: 224-7). The sports and events however, changed considerably. Croquet, golf and ballooning were to disappear from future Olympics for good while female yachting and equestrianism and tennis events were to become significant only after World War Two. Women's archery became important in 1908, swimming was added in 1912 but it was not until 1928 that one team gymnastics and five athletics events were included in the Olympic programme. It has nevertheless been encouraging to look at the sheer diversity of women who have represented Britain in the last hundred and ten years. For example, the youngest female competitor in Olympic history was Cecilia Colledge who skated in the 1932 Los Angeles games at eleven years and seventy-eight days. The eldest female competitor was also British. Lorna Johnstone first took part in the 1956 Stockholm dressage individual competition, appeared again in the 1968 Mexico individual and team events and finally performed in both at the 1972 Munich games, aged

seventy. That increasing numbers of women, in a growing range of disciplines, have changed the Games between 1900 and 2012 is obvious to even the most casual observer. However, the extent to which women have transformed the Olympics remains to be more fully understood.

Questions of representation are fundamental to the Olympic project. Individuals ostensibly take part on behalf of Great Britain, not England, Northern Ireland, Scotland or Wales (though athletes may not feel their primary affiliation is to what is now called *TeamGB*). Gender and a form of nationalism are two of the crucial ways through which Olympism has been presented and understood because on the one hand, most sports are separated into male and female events and, on the other, medals tables are judged by the complete haul of the representative teams. Medallism, by which is meant counting the sum of each kind (gold, silver and bronze - not as won by male or female athletes) has been with us since at least 1908 when British-American rivalry made totals a point of political comment. However, there remains to be a monograph on British women in the Olympics from 1900 to the present. A study such as this is long overdue given the scale of the enterprise.

Bruce Kidd is one academic among many who do not accept the idea of a revival of Olympism from ancient times. Kidd reminds us that the 'founder' of the modern Games, Pierre de Coubertin 'appropriated and recast the symbols of the ancient Games for his own purposes' (1984: 70). De Coubertin's friendly international athletic rivalry was not a fit environment for women competitors, though female applause for male athleticism was, he thought, a just reward. Looking at the wider cultural context, it is possible to place his views as a paradoxical form of conservative innovation, since sport was as much a part of modernity as was exploration, fashion, music, and technological experimentation (Lee-Potter, 1984; Warner, 2006 and Gundle, 2008). The emphasis on literature and the culture ran parallel with sport, however, not always in the ways that De Coubertin intended. Art historians might be just as interested in the media developments in over the lifespan of the games as in who competed in what disciplines, though cultural histories can often overlook sport (Marien, 2002). Jennifer Hargreaves has also called the transnational 'respect and goodwill' of the games,

a spurious idealism which does not accord with reality. The history of the Olympics could be rewritten as a history of power and elitism, obsessions and excesses, divisions and exploitation. Certainly, the modern Olympic movement has been imbued with male chauvinism and domination over women. The position of women in the Olympics does

not depend only on their relationship and struggles with men – it varies historically and is different for women from different nations and with different backgrounds (1984: 52).

The last sentence certainly rang true when I began collecting material for this research and has proven increasingly so as the project has progressed. However, in the autobiographical material referred to in section five of this work, I found a great deal of self-determination in the memoirs of Britain's female Olympians and, as such, these books, many of which are held in the British Library collections, are an important source for researchers. The complexity of the Games is such that they, and the movement as a whole, have been categorized as now having entered a phase of post-Olympism (Bale and Christensen, 2004: 5). By this, the authors mean that the scale and scope of the project is so large as to only enable a fractured and incomplete understanding of smaller aspects of it at any one time. For example, Doug Booth's essay in the Bale and Christensen collection uses the textual device of a lower case 'o' in its title to draw attention to the changing and amorphous nature of what the games mean and have meant (2004: 13). Whether or not readers agree with academics that the olympic movement is un-deserving of the capitalisation of a proper noun, or are just too big to understand, the issue of who and what is represented by individuals and the games themselves is a continuing challenge for those who write on the subject.

I am primarily interested in British women Olympic competitors. While several of the people I have researched have had multiple roles as athletes and coaches, administrators, volunteers, politicians, designers, writers, media presenters and a range of other careers, they are part of a select band who have represented Great Britain and Northern Ireland at some part of their active career as sportswomen. The British Olympic Association (BOA), formed in 1905, celebrated its centenary in book form called *Chasing Gold* to chronicle 'the greatest achievements of British competitors in Olympic Summer and Winter Games from 1896 to 2004' (2005: 5). Whether at the level of the individual, the team, the nation or some other form of community, the athletes of the games stand for certain values; good, bad and all shades in between. A strong internationalism, present from the first London Games in 1908, and more recent globalisation, have increasingly mediated sportswomen from Britain as heroes and anti heroes in a number of countries as a result of their Olympic performances. Cosmopolitan forces have also been at work whereby overseas female Olympic rivals have registered on the British public consciousness, both as individuals (such as Fanny Blankers-Koen's four gold medals in London 1948, Wilma Rudolph three gold medals in Rome 1960 and Olga Korbut three gold medals in 1972 at Munich) and as groups. These women served as comparators for audiences against which to judge the performance and behaviour of

British representatives. The viewing public increasingly access female Olympic victories and defeats by means of a range of media platforms so the British influence on the games is a challenging topic to describe.

## 2: The British influence on the 'manly' revival of the modern Olympic Games

This historiography proposes a set of themes in order to examine the contribution of women to the games because we know relatively little about women in the Olympic movement, for all the millions of words written on the subject. Baron Pierre de Coubertin, the anglophile French founder of the International Olympic Committee (IOC), was famously inspired to do so by his admiration for the British male public school tradition and remained firmly opposed female participation all his life (1997: 142). The modern Olympics, as Coubertin described them in *Olympic Memoirs*, were from the outset a determinedly masculine construction. Born in 1863 of an aristocratic family, the defeat of France by the Prussians in 1870 led to Coubertin's longstanding interest in improving the physical fitness of his fellow countrymen. Thomas Hughes had published *Tom Brown's Schooldays* in English in 1857. After reading a French translation, Coubertin made a pilgrimage to the chapel at Rugby school, where it was set, some years later in 1884. He took its depiction of Thomas Arnold, the former head-teacher from 1828 to 1842, as an advocate of sports for boys in helping to instil physical robustness and integrity rather literally. Arnold's focus had been more moral and academic than sporting, while *Tom Brown* was a romanticised fiction of the author's childhood at the school. Nevertheless, as Tony Collins has recently suggested, 'aside from the occasional references to boxing being part of the British character by early nineteenth century writers such as Pierce Egan, no one before Hughes had ascribed a set of moral values to a sport...Rugby football now had an explicit social purpose' (2009:11). Fictionalised as it may have been, *Tom Brown* consequently did more than create a domestic 'rush to rugby'. Sport, in Coubertin's selective reading, helped to make boys into men.

Pierre Coubertin had also visited eighty-two year old Dr William Penny-Brookes and his Wenlock Games in 1890. From 1849 these had more of a regional, class-based inclusive purpose than public school sport. The Wenlock Games involved women in 'tea' races, for instance, thought to be more respectable than the more widespread smock races as the light-coloured garments became opaque with perspiration. Though these and other earlier local competitions can be over-emphasised as influences, Penny-Brookes had attempted to hold a national London-based Olympics at the Crystal Palace as early as 1866. John Astley Cooper's proposed Pan-Britannic festival of 1891 was another attempt at national competition

intended to strengthen Anglo-Saxon links with the Empire and the United States, by invitation-only.

Coubertin was to oppose the participation of women in the IOC or as competitors. Although the major force behind the games between the first Paris congress of the IOC in 1894 and his retirement as president of an established international festival of sport in 1925, his views did not prevail in his lifetime. They nevertheless continue to have a lasting influence to this day. Into the twenty-first century, the IOC still considers itself to be a patrimony and all of its presidents have been men: Demetrios Vikelas (Greece) 1894-1896; Baron Pierre de Coubertin (France) 1896-1925; Henri de Baillet-Latour (Belgium) 1925-1942; Sigfrid Edström (Sweden) 1946-1952; Avery Brundage (USA) 1952-1972; Lord Killanin of Dublin and Spittal (Ireland) 1972-1980; Juan Antonio Samaranch (Spain) 1980 -2001 and currently Jacques Rogge (Belgium).

The IOC was therefore a 'club for the boys' for almost ninety years, though the swimmer, Monique Berlioux was to be its director from 1967 to 1985, followed, as secretary-general, by Françoise Zweifel (Phillips, 2007: 266-7). It seems clear that women first tried to join the IOC in the 1930s. However, it was not until Avery Brundage's retirement as President, that the rules excluding women were changed: it took almost another ten years before Pirjo Haggman and Flor Isava-Fonseca were appointed to the IOC in 1981. Britain was consequently to have a female Prime Minister elected before it was to have an appointed International Olympic Committee representative. Mary Glen Haig, a foilist who competed in 1948, 1952, 1956 and 1960, was member number three hundred and forty when she was selected as the third woman to be appointed to the committee in 1982. She served as an honorary member since 1993, having been appointed to Dame Commander of the British Empire the same year. Currently only sixteen out of one hundred and seven IOC members are women. One of them is HRH Princess Anne, who was elected to the committee in 1988. This trajectory from the Baron's lone vision in the chapel at Rugby school to a complex international system of governance, with the Olympic Charter as the legal basis of the IOC from 1924 onwards, has been characterised as 'an evolution from utopia to pragmatism, with the emergence of so-called Olympic Law' (Maestre, 2007: 6). This now extends also to satellite organisations of the Olympic movement including the World Anti Doping Agency; the Court of Arbitration for Sport; the Olympic Congress and Commissions and the International Foundation for the Olympic Truce. Most of the advocacy for forms of female equity in this multifaceted administration comes from the Women and Sport Commission, led by Anita De Frantz, (De Frantz, 2000: 3). Given the administrative background described

above, it is unforeseeable at present to imagine an equal number of officials or to imagine whom the first woman President of the IOC will be. The focus of this work then, is the development of a late-Victorian male sports festival to the present incarnation of the games as an important twenty-first century media spectacle involving increasing numbers of female performers.<sup>i</sup>

For those who do not like sport, and do not like the values expressed through this form of cultural industry, it might appear easy to dismiss the whole endeavour as chauvinism of a particularly male, nationalistic, aggressive kind. It would also be simple to see female participation from De Coubertin's time onwards as a 'problem'. However, both these tendencies to straightforwardness should be resisted because the issues are more complex. Why was Coubertin's influence regarding women competitors limited? Who did get to compete in what sports and events at what points in time? What wider changes, forced the Olympics to modify and alter its view of female athletes in a range of sports? Women competitors may have become more central to the work of the IOC in the last quarter of the twentieth century, but it does not automatically follow that earlier female participants saw their Olympic experience as any more, or less, valuable than today's professional performers. One of the most significant historical tensions in the discussion then, is the sporting culture produced by British women who looked to become Olympians, in relation to the frameworks imposed on female athletes, individually and as a group, by the IOC, the National Organising Committees (NOCs) and the various affiliated sporting International Federations (IFs).

### **3: London 2012 and the legacy of Britain's Olympic contribution**

London is therefore currently enjoying the symbolism of the British association with the Olympic movement by becoming the first city to host the games for the third time in 2012 (the previous occasions were in 1908 and 1948). Arguably, a love of rules and regulations has been a central aspect of this contribution: the 1908 games saw the bureaucratisation of many guiding principles, including the first internal regulations drafted to produce the IOC Directory. The programme of Olympic sports took some considerable time to regularise and organisers have had something of a revolving door attitude to particular women's sports and events that have sometimes been in, and then out of, the schedule. In relation to global processes, Alan Tomlinson has characterised the 1900 Paris and 1904 St Louis events as peripheral to great trade shows, while 'The Franco-British Exhibition of 1908 became the saviour of the Olympic idea' (2005: 50). Rebecca Jenkins based her book on London 1908 around the construction of the White City arena and events in Shepherd's Bush, as she

argues that the Olympics would not have registered on the collective consciousness without the stadium built by the exhibition company (2008: 15). The haphazard approach whereby the organising committees of the host countries took control of the programme, in coincidence with exhibitions, meant that women took part in these early games, albeit in a limited number of disciplines, as has been discussed above. By 1914 with forty-eight IOC members, the informal body became more organised of necessity. Thankfully though, the British influence was not always very persuasive: a 'Proposed Standard Programme for Future Olympic Games' drawn up by the self-titled 'Governing Associations of Sport represented on The British Olympic Council' would have include athletics; boxing; clay bird (sic); cycling; fencing; football; gymnastics; hockey; lawn tennis; modern pentathlon; rowing; riding; shooting; skating; swimming and wrestling. If this had been set as the definitive programme, women would only have been able to participate in an individual foil event; singles and doubles lawn tennis competitions; Ladies' individual and mixed pair figure skating; four women's diving events, plus two individual and one team swimming races.

Nevertheless, when I began this research in 2005, recently after London won the bidding process for 2012, neither the British Olympic Association (BOA) nor the International Olympic Committee museum staff in Lausanne could tell me how many British women competitors there had been in the history of the modern games. I was intrigued, but not particularly surprised, by this lack of interest in the IOC and BOA's own history. *A History of British Women Olympians* is therefore intended as a contribution, not only to comparative research in Olympic studies, but also to the wider field of international sport and the gendered political economies of major cultural events. Today, the BOA website statistical information estimates that approximately 1, 500 women competed at Summer Olympics between 1900 and 2008 and around 250 female athletes at Winter Games between 1924 and 2010. These compare with roughly 5, 500 and 725 male British athletes respectively. In addition there are Paralympians and Special Olympic competitors as well as those women outside IOC-organised and sanctioned events, so definitions of who is to be included in what kind of Olympic tradition can be less than clear-cut. Who is *not* considered to be an Olympian is as telling as who is included by convention: the bibliography for example includes the autobiography of Beryl Burton, one of Britain's greatest sportswomen of all time who could not compete as a cyclist because there was no female event until 1984 (Burton, 1986). Asking questions about the figures cited by various sports bodies is merely a starting point, therefore. What are the stories of these British women Olympians? Why have they been largely overlooked in the public and academic literature regarding the Games? Who comprises the female British Olympic tradition?

While there have been histories of national participation, Allen Guttman has also noted, 'Since American and British historians and journalists tend to focus on their compatriots, who have in fact been central players to the Olympic drama, there has been little incentive to publish special histories entitled *Uncle Sam at the Olympics* or *John Bull Gathers the Gold*' (1992: 198).' In spite of this, some British women Olympians will have become household names, such as skater Jeanette Altwegg, swimmer Anita Lonsbrough and ice dancer Jayne Torvill, as have athletes like Anne Packer, Mary Rand, Mary Peters, Sally Gunnell and Kelly Holmes. What though, of the other medallists; the 'probables' and the 'possibles' for selection; the nearly-winners and those who were just pleased to take part? The approach to the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games gave me a motivation to write just such a history of British women. While a collective biography of this kind would not want to wholly ignore their male colleagues, I am more interested in what Olympic competition has meant for British women such as Charlotte Cooper/ Sterry, Jennie Fletcher, Ethel Muckelt, Muriel Freeman, Eileen Hiscock, Violet Webb, Dorothy Odam, Hilary Lang, Patricia Smythe, Lillian Board, Tessa Sanderson, Fatima Whitbread, Jane Sixsmith, Sharon Rendle and Denise Lewis to name but a few. Some of these names will be instantly recognisable as medallists. A few enthusiasts will be able to note that Ethel Muckelt, for example, won the first female Winter Games medal for Britain in Chamonix in 1924 with a figure skating bronze when the schedules were held as separate seasonal games. For many of the British public however, these names will have, at best, a vague familiarity and who represented Britain in which disciplines will be difficult to recall. For the record the respective sports were tennis, swimming, figure skating, swimming, fencing, athletics (Hiscock, Webb and Odam), skiing, equestrianism, athletics, equestrianism, athletics (Board, Sanderson and Whitbread), hockey, judo and athletics.

While Olympism has always been a political project therefore, I cannot share the sentiment that British women who have participated have somehow been naïve or seduced by the games. It is possible to argue that women have used the Olympics for their own purposes, even while acknowledging diverse chauvinism and various abuses that are an inherent part of the phenomenon. Why would a female athlete *not* want to be applauded by an international, now global, audience when historically there have been fewer opportunities for her skill to be recognised than exist for sportsmen? Sport remains one of the most prominent examples of gendered labour markets in global society. The kudos and the fame are surely the point, when the amateur tradition has been so strong in preventing direct financial benefit from winning or taking part. Gentlemanly amateurism, an invention of



Victorian and Edwardian sporting bodies, has been a difficult and changing concept to determine, let alone police in the twentieth century. By the twenty-first century it has all but disappeared from the very professional preparation on behalf of individuals and nation-states in advance of the Games. Amateurism has nevertheless been a defining aspect of Olympism. Moreover, as the next section outlines, it has arguably had a more long-lasting and widespread influence generally for women in sport than it has for many sportsmen.

#### 4: Amateurism

Until 1983 women's participation in the Olympic Games was heavily influenced by a male ideal of gentlemanly amateurism. That year, the IOC accepted a proposal from the International Amateur Athletics Federation (IAAF) that male and female participants should be recompensed for time spent competing that took them away from their work, allowed to earn money from sport-related sources such as endorsements, and that these earnings should be placed in a trust fund for their retirement. The idea that an individual should compete in sport for the love of the game, rather than for financial benefit consequently has a much longer part in the history of Olympic competition than the more recent professional era. Most British sport had conceded the principle that sportsmen and women had a right to be paid the highest salary that they could negotiate in relation to their athletic labour and for related-endorsements rather earlier. Appendix 1 of Lincoln Allison's *Amateurism in Sport* provides an overview of developments from 1863-1995 (2001: 165-171). The late Olympic recognition of the open secret that was 'shamateurism' is noteworthy. The so-called state-sponsored amateurs of the United States college system and the communist countries had made this an issue since Soviet Olympic participation began in 1952. Though often viewed with nostalgia as a 'purer' form of sport, amateurism was the subject of much hypocrisy: not least, administrators who enforced bans on athletes earning, often small, sums of money and would then often travel First Class and benefit materially themselves from their sporting contacts. As a class-based, financially-defined principle, it was an aspirational luxury, as well as an ethical ideal. Again, much changed after Avery Brundage retired. By 1980, after the Moscow Games, Juan Antonio Samaranch was elected to President of the IOC and wished to make the Olympics a world championship in all sports. Though he by no means succeeded, this necessarily meant accepting professionalism and a more commercialised future for the Games.

However, while amateurism *is* important, it is also necessary to differentiate the upper, middle and working class women who took part in sport. Contemporary publications are

becoming more readily available, especially in projects to digitise their contents and those with search facilities certainly help with this kind of research. Nineteenth century magazines such as *The Queen*, *The Graphic* and *Pall Mall Gazette* showed women cycling, yachting, playing golf, cricket and football, shooting arrows, climbing the Alps and taking part in everything from gymnastic drills, to life-saving, fencing, ballooning and field sports. If the images are useful to analyse aspects of dress, sporting goods and social context, the conservatism of editorials in some publications also reflects that female athleticism was a moral panic of its time (Huggins, 2004: 137-140). Through choice, or because of necessity, many women (and men) ignored the moral superiority of competing for no financial reward and so amateurism was to become expressed in over-complicated judicial and logistical terms, as much as in sporting behaviour.

## **5: Biographies and autobiographies of some key British women Olympians**

Not all Olympians wrote about their experiences so it is sometimes necessary to compare what biographical material there is and to place it in historical context. Though it was not to appear in 1904 in St Louis, tennis remained significant in the early Games and, as the first British woman to win an Olympic competition in Paris 1900, Charlotte Cooper is a particularly interesting sporting icon. Charlotte Cooper's five singles successes at Wimbledon from 1895 to 1908 put her amongst the all-time greats in the sport (Barrett and Little, 2005: 11). She was twenty-four when she first won and is said to have cycled to Wimbledon with her racket clipped to a bracket on the front fork of her bicycle. Her final win in 1908 at 37 years and 282 days makes her the most senior champion. In the meantime she married Alfred Sterry (a future president of the International Lawn Tennis Federation), had a daughter, Gwen, and son, Rex who was to later serve for many years as Vice Chair of the All England Lawn Tennis Club. This rather straightforward set of facts is significant because medical opinion had expressed concern over the effect of sport on women's ability to reproduce and there were particular concerns that maternal physical over-exertion would produce poorly offspring (Fletcher, 1984: 15). The debate of 'The Woman Question' took place as Darwinists, Eugenicist patriots and those who saw women as 'mother to the race' had also argued that higher education would divert women's limited energy from their procreative function to the brain at the risk of making them sterile. Like many moral panics, that increasing numbers of women were taking to an activity, in this case sport in the late Victorian and Edwardian era, seems to have provoked conflict over what was desirable, decent and proper. There was much opinion but little science on which to base regulation.

Women such as Cooper/ Sterry combined motherhood and sustained competition with the support of their families in a form of practical, if not overtly political, feminism. They disproved the fallacies merely by getting on with their lives. A double-gold medallist in singles and mixed doubles in 1900, Charlotte Cooper's sustained enthusiasm for top-level competition also contradicts the commonly-held view that only wealthy and leisured Anglo-American women participated in Paris as a distracting amusement for cosmopolitan tourists. Even so, it would be possible to argue that Cooper's keenness for Wimbledon surpassed her interest in Olympic competition. Her doubles partner in Paris, Reginald Doherty, became one of a long line of male multiple medallists spanning more than one Olympics, with a total of three golds and one bronze from the 1900 and 1908 Games. Charlotte Sterry chose not to take part in the London 1908 competition which was won by Dorothea Douglass/ Chambers, whom she beat in the third round that year at Wimbledon, while the silver medal went to Dora Boothby, whom she beat in the quarter finals. According to the early BOA yearbooks women's open air and covered-court Olympic tennis began with Mrs Chambers' victory in 1908, effectively writing the events of eight years earlier out of history (1914: 58-9). Charlotte Sterry nevertheless continued to cycle to compete at Wimbledon Ladies' Finals until 1919. While Sterry was undoubtedly an amateur, many other performers had to choose between a professional future and an Olympic one.

Some Olympians have become as well-known for their writing as for their sporting career. Pat Smythe, Britain's leading horsewoman from the mid 1940s to the mid 1960s, apparently relied on Lucozade for all her energies though, as an amateur, her fee to endorse the fact benefited the British Equestrian Fund:

'I spend as much time caring for my horses as I do riding them. That's why I make full use of energy-giving Lucozade.' Pat Smythe always has to be on top of her job and full of go, as you do. That's why, like her you should drink delicious, refreshing Lucozade to supply your body with energy when it's needed most. Always keep a bottle of Lucozade in your dressing room, ask for it wherever you go. Lucozade can play an important part in the part you play (Lucozade advertisement, 1955: 10).

Smythe had made it quite clear that she was financially independent because of her writing and was awarded an OBE before she won a show-jumping bronze medal in 1956 (1992:100). Female amateurism may have been mediated by the press as a very British virtue but the issue is more considerably more complicated (Wagg, 2007: 100-121). A degree of media-awareness enabled female athletes to present themselves as 'ordinary' amateurs.

When this was not convenient or to their advantage, they employed other strategies: both Pat Smythe (after she became a bronze medallist) and Mary Rand (before she won gold in 1964) played effectively elaborate games of 'cat and mouse' with reporters keen to intrude on their marriage and honeymoon plans, for example (Koechlin-Smythe, 1992: 104 and Rand 1969: 61-4). The *Daily Express* was to get exclusive photographs and stories by pre arrangement in both cases; Smythe already wrote for the paper on show-jumping and skiing. When Brundage threatened to withdraw her amateur status in 1960 because of her journalistic work, he chose to overlook the fact that most male Olympic equestrians had earned their living in the armed forces and at least one had taught at the Spanish Riding School.

It is worth saying that 'sport for sport's sake' seems to have inspired many British women up until the 1980s, even while they may, on the one hand, have found the blazeratti over-officious and, on the other, might have received financial compensation or gifts. This large and complex issue requires us to move from the macro level of institutions to the micro level of people's lives: doing so illustrates the effect of ideas on lived practices. For example, the publication of a book, *Sprint to Fame*, cost Dorothy Hyman her international amateur status in 1964 at the age of twenty-three, even though journalist Phil Pilley had actually written the manuscript. Having won the BBC Sports Personality of the Year in 1963, Hyman was thought to have been 'cashing-in' on her athletic achievements by issuing the ghosted autobiography. This was the more ironic when domestic reinstatement as an amateur in national events in 1969 meant that she was to run faster times than she had when she won 100m silver and 200m bronze at the 1960 Rome Olympics. Hyman had directly criticised amateur principles imposed by men like Avery Brundage, who could afford to amass a thirty five million dollar collection of Jade objects d'art, while her family did not have an indoor bathroom. From a coal-mining background and one of five children, Hyman had taken two buses after work to train at a track eight miles away in preparation for her Olympic medals. Not only was there no nearer track of sufficient standard on which to practice, she had to go to a neighbour's house to wash after training. The strain of supporting her Olympic preparation meant that her father had risen at four thirty in the morning to work down the mines, was back at two in the afternoon to rest briefly and eat before he had taken Dorothy training at 6.30 in the evening. He died at Easter in 1961 at the age of fifty-three.

Strictly speaking, Dorothy Hyman received broken time payments from the National Coal Board where she worked as a planning technician, as did Mary Rand for relatively light post room work at the Guinness brewery (1969: 45). Hyman's commitment to athletics is

nevertheless evident in that she established the Dorothy Hyman Track Club in Barnsley and coached there for over forty years. Martin Polley has contrasted this with the new professionalism exemplified by Denise Lewis, who won the bronze medal in the heptathlon at the 1996 Atlanta Olympics. The relatively recent changes have enabled 'a black girl from a single-parent family in West Bromwich, with a BTEC in computing, [to] become an icon in a sport dominated in earlier generations by a white, male, public school and Oxbridge elite' (2000: 82). By publishing the book in 1964 Dorothy Hyman made it clear that she was burned-out and fed-up with athletics. While there has been an assumption that state-amateurism, such as practised in the United States colleges and Eastern European countries, had a high human cost, the effect of British systems on individuals (male or female) is evidently in need of more historical investigation (Polley, 2000: 106).

The final point to be made about using biographies and autobiographies is that representing Great Britain at an Olympics is unlike appearing as an English, Scottish, Welsh or Northern Irish competitor in other sporting events. Choosing to represent a particular nation, state or team in international competitions is clearly complicated and involves more than owning a particular passport, acquiring nationality through residency, marriage or through right to dual citizenship. Though she died at the Monte Carlo European Championships in September 1947, Nancy Riach had been hailed as an Olympic hopeful and was said to have been 'the finest swimmer that the British Empire has ever produced, and the finest ambassador of sport that Scotland or any other country within the British Empire has ever turned out (Walker, 1994: 150).' Walker places Nancy in a very localised context of Motherwell and Lanarkshire before her mentor David Crabb appeared to concentrate on future-London 1948 bronze medallist Cathie Gibson and the Riach family moved to Airdrie. Scottish-English rivalry can be part of the wider British context therefore, as can the cosmopolitanism of Dundee-born silver medallist Liz Mc Colgan, who in 1988 helped to establish a new era of female distance running only four years after the marathon distance was introduced for women.

Founded in 1989, the International Paralympic Committee is an international non-profit organization formed and run on behalf of 165 affiliated nations, including ParalympicsGB. The Paralympic title refers to a parallel tournament to the Olympic Games, as an elite multi-sport event for athletes with a disability. The profile of the charity as a whole and of individuals such as Tanni Grey-Thompson continues to increase. A holder of eleven Paralympic gold medals, Grey-Thompson was awarded third place in the BBC Sports Personality of the Year 2000; has become BBC Wales Sports Personality of the Year three times; taken the title 'Welsh Woman of the Year' and in 2004 was awarded a DBE. This tells us something about the increased role of international disability sport, and post-devolution

Wales as well as about Grey-Thompson. As a six-time winner of the London marathon wheelchair race for women, she has used her achievements for a successful media and administrative profile after retiring from active competition. Martin Johnes has written of a marginalization inherent in male nationalist rhetoric 'that still dominates popular perceptions of what Welshness is' (2004: 64-5). However, looking at the careers of Welsh women Olympians suggests a need for revision here: clearly being a British Paralympian has also become another means of expressing diverse and alternative identities through representative international sport in a post-devolution framework.

Mary Peters remains a key figure in Britain's Olympic history: her competitive career and subsequent public profile provide one example of how complicated webs of affiliation and identity can be. The Peters family had moved to Ballymena from Liverpool when Mary was eleven years old and she went on to represent Great Britain in many internationals including the Olympics, coming fourth in 1964, ninth in Mexico due to ankle injury in 1968 and winning gold with a world record in 1972 by beating local heroine Heidemarie Rosendahl in Munich (1974: 35-40). Since 1972 Peters has been an international figure, travelling extensively as manager of the British women's athletics team (1979-84), a member of the International Amateur Athletic Federation (1995-9) and President of the British Athletics Federation (1996-8). In recognition of her achievements, she was awarded the DBE in 2000. Peters is active in the tourism industry for Northern Ireland and has represented the region in sports administration. She also has a well-defined local presence having worked in Belfast as a teacher, raised funds for the renovation of The Mary Peters Track and becoming the Lord Lieutenant of the city in 2009. It is a post she is expected to hold when the 2012 Games come to London. She has clearly inspired many people and self-consciously sought a public role. Mary P. continues to hold charitable and personal ties with the Liverpool area, where her father and brother moved back to after her mother's death in 1956, so it would not be a surprise if more than one Lancastrian identified with her personal ethos of raw talent, hard work and easy good humour. Therefore, avoiding a homogenous reading of female sporting Britishness involves relating gender and nationality to other aspects of identity, in themselves, complicated. Having represented *TeamGB* therefore does not necessarily mean that an athlete saw herself as any one thing at any particular time. Reflecting some of the variety of the women who have represented Britain as Olympians is therefore a key objective of the ongoing research.

## 6: Conclusion

It is quite difficult to draw conclusions to a piece of research still underway and especially one designed to set some kind of an agenda for others to develop from the bibliographic sources. One key concern is that there is now generally more danger from lack of exercise in the Western world than there is from over-training in sport. This is more so for girls than boys and the statistics, such as they can be relied upon, are in some cases showing a decline in the approach to London 2012. According to the Women's Sports and Fitness Foundation (WSFF) in 2010, less than 20% of British women take part in the recommended amount of physical exercise to benefit their health and girls leave school half as active as boys. According to the figures cited by WSFF released by Sport England today, regular active leisure participation amongst women has fallen by 61,000 to 2.727 million, while the number of men taking part has increased. These surveys use relatively generous definitions of active leisure, including walking a mile. Can we afford to overlook how British 'family' of Olympic athletes has changed over the twentieth century and into the twenty-first? Who do British women and girls, generally, not take up sport and, historically, how have they become discouraged from taking part in physical activity? Will an elite Olympic legacy change century-old perceptions of female physical inferiority?

If the subject throws some light on sport generally, it is worth also examining alternatives to De Coubertin's version of the Olympics. The Women's Amateur Athletic Association (WAAA) had taken sole charge of female track and field in this country after its formation in 1922 (Duval, 2000: 41). It was to be the mid 1980s before it merged with the Amateur Athletic Association (AAA) to form a single body for British athletics. The WAAA was not wholly administered by women but it was largely so. It refused to send any British female track and field athletes to the 1928 games in boycott of the limited programme for women. British women athletes had already taken part in other international competitions and wanted the Olympic programme to better reflect this variety of disciplines. It is the only self-imposed gender boycott in the history of the games and it was made because there was at the time a possible alternative. The WAAA had fully supported a separatist Women's Olympics, or World Games movement since this had been first held in 1921 in Monte Carlo. These Jeux Féminins had led to the formation of an international Fédération Sportive Feminine Internationale (FSFI) who organised the first 'Women's Olympics' in 1922 with a varied programme including basketball and football as a crowd favourite (Leigh and Bonin, 1997: 72).

Led by Alice Milliat, these became known as Women's World Games in later editions due to protracted negotiations in which the IOC fought to protect the Olympic title. The complexity of the diplomatic relations between the FSFI and the IOC are protracted, but it is worth saying here that the crowds of twenty thousand plus for these events disproved the myth that no one was interested in women's sport. It was precisely because crowds were attending that the IOC chose to eventually take control of women's athletics from 1926 onwards. Milliat conceded control because she thought she had won ten female events in 1928; the IAAF reneged and offered only five. The 100 metres, 800 metres, a 4 x 100 metre relay, high jump and discus were the extent of the 1928 programme. A world record time for the 800 metres nevertheless saw it withdrawn, until its reintroduction in 1960, due to reports that the runners were exhausted. A 1500 metre race was not introduced for women until 1972. A women's marathon eventually followed in 1984. An affection for women-only games was perhaps helped by the fact that the British were winners of the event in Paris 1922, again in Gothenburg 1926 and, having lost to Germany in the 1930 Prague tournament, were to play host at the White City Stadium in 1934. The lack of an athletic programme before 1928 and the British boycott that year probably cost Mary Lines her place in Olympic history: she had won five of the eleven track and field events in 1922. While many of the records later became recognised by the IOC, the women are not considered to have been 'proper' medallists. Violet Piercy had run the marathon distance at Chiswick in 1926 in 3 hours 40 minutes and was similarly unrecognised for her achievements while Winifred Pritchard, who had won all four races in the British yachting trials for the 1948 games, fell foul of an IOC rule banning women from competing at Torquay to the consternation of the Royal Yachting Association (Hampton: 2009:144). In the approach to London 2012, it is as, if not more, important to remember *their* names as those written into the record as famous twentieth and twenty-first century Olympic athletes.



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<sup>i</sup> Belinda Wheaton 'Selling Out? The commercialisation and globalisation of lifestyle Sport' in Lincoln Allison (ed.) *The Global Politics of Sport: The role of global institutions in sport* (Oxon: Routledge, 2005) pp. 158-9. Wheaton suggests, for example, that windsurfing, snowboarding and the like having joined the Olympic programme with a sporting culture of 'ambivalent masculinity' comprised of supportiveness and camaraderie by both men and women compared with institutionalised 'conventional' gender relations. I notice that the 2010 women's ski-cross competition in the Winter Games in Vancouver is still termed a "Ladies' event" though.

Jean Williams 2<sup>nd</sup> September 2010